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SUBJECT: POLAND IN NATO: LOOKING FOR RESPECT

Classified By: Political Counselor F. Daniel Sainz for Reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: "Nothing about us without us" has become the clarion call of Poland's security strategy in the post-communist era. Poles are determined to have a say in security arrangements that affect them, having suffered all too often as the pawn of larger powers. Because Poles see NATO as the best guarantor of a new era of security, their primary goal is to refocus Alliance attention on its traditional role of defending its individual members. Ten years after joining the Alliance, Poland has earned a reputation as one of the most active, committed Allies. But full respect, in the Poles' view, means a greater Polish voice on key Alliance decisions. Now that the country has paid its dues in various expeditionary operations, Warsaw will push for greater influence within the Alliance -- especially in forging a new Strategic Concept that serves Poland's security requirements. END SUMMARY.

NATO OPERATIONS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

¶2. (C) From President Lech Kaczynski to desk officers at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Polish officials consistently characterize the country's membership in NATO as the cornerstone of national security. Support for the Alliance is broad-based and cuts across party lines. Although the public is much less enthusiastic about combat deployments abroad (roughly 73% of the population opposes sending troops to Afghanistan, for example), senior officials cite participation in NATO operations as the nation's top military priority. Poland is cutting back its involvement in UN- and EU-sanctioned missions to maintain its force levels in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the NATO Training Mission in Iraq, and Operation Active Endeavor in the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, in spite of severe GOP budget problems, the Ministry of National Defense (MND), recently found sufficient cost savings to offset a plus-up of its 1600-strong contingent in Afghanistan's Ghazni Province to 2000 troops.

¶3. (C) Poles continue to see NATO as a beacon of freedom and an incentive for reforms by prospective members, but their main focus is on NATO's practical security benefits. At the heart of the Polish commitment to NATO is the notion of allied solidarity. Prime Minister Donald Tusk, in a recent presentation commemorating the country's 10th anniversary in the Alliance, said Poland was willing to take on difficult missions because it and other new member states depend on the Article V security guarantees of the Washington Treaty. Implicit in Tusk's remarks is the widely shared sentiment that Poles live up to their operational commitments because they expect Allies to come to Warsaw's defense if needed.

¶4. (C) In this respect, Poles have become uncomfortable with

the perceived drift of the Alliance in recent years toward expeditionary operations as opposed to NATO's more traditional territorial defense posture. They do not see the two functions as mutually exclusive, but would prefer more balance between them, including acknowledgment of former Warsaw Pact countries' legitimate security concerns. Piotr Soltysiak, Director of the MFA's NATO Office, told us that Warsaw viewed Article V guarantees as the Alliance's "first task." Expeditionary operations would remain important, but Soltysiak maintained that Russia's intervention in Georgia last August had exposed the need for NATO to pay more attention to traditional defense.

NATO OVERSTRETCHED

¶15. (C) NATO's expeditionary burdens have impacted favored Polish projects. The MFA's Soltysiak emphasized that in the current economic climate, Allied resources are more stretched than ever. Soltysiak cited the example of the NATO Response Force (NRF), which is supposed to consist of 25,000 troops but exists largely on paper. Warsaw views a fully operational NRF as crucial to Article V defense, and objects that allies have not devoted sufficient resources to this core function, because of other priorities. Marek Madej, an analyst with the Polish International Affairs Institute (PISM), which often serves as an unofficial sounding board for MFA ideas, said NRF was the main casualty of Afghanistan resource requirements.

¶16. (C) Soltysiak also complained of uneven burden-sharing among allies. Poland, as one of NATO's more activist members, had to take on more responsibility -- and sometimes casualties -- because others were not willing to pull their weight. Madej of PISM was even more critical of allies' shortfalls, and bitterly referred to Germany as the "sick man of the Alliance." Soltysiak suggested that Alliance resources such as training areas and other infrastructure projects should be channeled to Poland and other new member states as compensation for their willingness to take on the tough missions.

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

¶17. (C) Front and center among Poland's NATO priorities is the need for a new Strategic Concept (SC). Warsaw has already contributed substantially to this effort since former Foreign Minister Adam Daniel Rotfeld is one of the Wise Men whom Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer selected to draft a security declaration for this week's summit meeting; the declaration is viewed as the core draft for a new SC. Both DefMin Bogdan Klich and ForMin Radoslaw Sikorski have long advocated the need for an updated SC which better addresses Polish priorities, including re-emphasis of Article V operations. PISM's Madej called for a substantive SC, to be unveiled at the next summit meeting in Lisbon. Madej said the SC should improve burden-sharing and encourage infrastructure development. He said the Concept should contain meaningful "guarantees of commitment" in the spirit of Article V, not merely "solidarity declarations." In Madej's view, the chances for consensus on a new Concept are boosted by various unifying factors -- NATO at war, French re-integration into NATO's military command structure, and strong but collegial U.S. leadership under President Obama. The main goal was to arrive at a document less open to selective interpretation.

¶18. (C) Afghanistan also looms large in Polish thinking. Sikorski has publicly declared on numerous occasions that NATO's engagement in Afghanistan will continue to be crucial for Poland, while Klich has described the effort there as a test of Alliance credibility and, therefore, one of Poland's highest priorities. The MFA's Soltysiak told us the chief limitation for Poland in Afghanistan was the lack of financial resources. Joanna Nikorowicz, a foreign policy

specialist in the Prime Minister's Office, agreed. She acknowledged the lack of public support for the deployment in Ghazni Province, but asserted that, barring an unforeseen catastrophe, the Prime Minister was willing to keep the forces there even in the event of casualties. Our PISM interlocutors cautioned, however, that Warsaw would likely be skeptical of an expanded NATO military role in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

¶9. (C) NATO-Russia relations are always a subject of deep concern to Poland. At the MFA, Soltysiak said Warsaw had concurred with the Alliance's March 5 decision to re-activate the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) despite lingering reservations in the wake of the Russia-Georgia conflict last year. According to Soltysiak, Warsaw is ready to discuss any subject within the NRC, including sensitive topics like Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev's initiative for new security architecture in Europe and cooperation on missile defense. Poland's redlines were similar to those of the U.S. -- no Russian veto over Alliance decisions and no de facto recognition of spheres of influence. Madej observed that Poles were often tagged unfairly as Russophobes, and Allies too often dismissed sound Polish insights based on long historical experience with the Russians. Madej said the Alliance should not refrain from criticizing Moscow in the NRC when it inevitably failed to live up to expectations or did not follow through on agreements.

¶10. (C) NATO decision-making is a sore point among some Poles, who believe that older members of the Alliance often do not accord sufficient respect to them. A former Polish Ambassador to NATO, Jerzy Nowak, said Warsaw's approach to national security is guided by the principle, "Nothing about us without us," a reference to the country's historical legacy as an all-too-frequent pawn of larger powers. Our PISM interlocutors told us that Polish officials generally preferred to refrain from public criticism of Alliance procedures and decisions, but this might change now that Poland's ten years of experience and willingness to participate in combat operations have given the country more credibility. Nowak, a retired diplomat now serving as the head of the Euro-Atlantic Association, served as Sikorski's campaign manager in his bid to become de Hoop Scheffer's replacement as Secretary General. Nowak told us recently that senior Polish officials were disappointed with the way the selection process was conducted, and would advocate for more transparent, "democratic" procedures in choosing future Secretaries General.

¶11. (C) On other NATO priorities:

-- Poland will remain an enthusiastic supporter of NATO's Open Door policy on new membership, but both our official and non-official interlocutors commented that membership for countries like Ukraine and Georgia would likely remain on the back burner for the time being.

-- Klich has called for improvements in NATO-EU relations, noting that the Berlin-Plus formula was an insufficient framework for cooperation. However, none of our interlocutors was able to suggest a replacement mechanism.

-- Polish officials, including Klich, have called on the Alliance to consider new missions like energy security and cyber security, but Madej and Lukasz Kulesa, Acting Chief of PISM's Research Department, told us that the MFA was only interested in these activities if they did not undermine a focus on Article V-style territorial defense.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) On most issues, Poland has been a strong supporter of U.S. positions within the Alliance and has been a reliable Ally ready to take on tough expeditionary missions. We do not anticipate any significant changes in this regard, subject to local resource constraints. But we also expect

Poland to play a more assertive role in Brussels, especially in relation to Strategic Concept deliberations. The Poles have ten years of experience under their belt and have paid their dues; they believe they are owed recognition of their legitimate security concerns.

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